THE WORLD OF ISLAM TODAY

The world of Islam is passing through a crisis of confidence. However unpalatable it may be, the truth remains that the qualities of self-awareness and self-reliance are not the distinguishing features of Muslims in any part of the world today. Even the Muslim countries that are free (no matter whether they have been free for centuries or attained freedom only recently) are intellectually and educationally subservient to the West. The rulers of these countries often show commendable courage, even to the extent of incurring grave risks, in the political field but where the cultural, intellectual and educational spheres are concerned they betray an awful lack of self-confidence and freedom of judgement. It is an accepted fact that cultural and intellectual servility is much more harmful and degrading than political serfdom. Once a country has passed under the cultural and intellectual domination of another, it becomes unnecessary for the latter to annex it politically. Further, since in the modern world the conquest and annexation of a country has no longer remained possible the Big Powers are getting inclined to concentrate, more and more, on strengthening their cultural and intellectual hold over the the weaker nations instead of seeking their political subjugation.

If there was any power in the present-day world which could challenge the cultural and intellectual supremacy of the West and its resulting ideological domination it was the World of Islam with its own distinctive personality, its characteristic programme of life and its soul-stirring moral and spiritual appeal, but, unfortunately, owing to reasons enumerated in detail by the Author in an earlier book[1] the Muslims have lapsed into such a state of lethargy and disorder that they can offer little resistance to the growing influence of the West. In addition to it, the Western nations are taking due care to dissipate what little of moral and spiritual awareness and vitality is left in them through a number of well-calculated steps, some of which bear the stamp of innocence and magnanimity while others are openly hostile and vicious. Even the patronage of institutions like the UNESCO is proving detrimental to the interests of Islam in the Muslim countries in many ways. The moral and spiritual stamina of Muslims is being continuously sapped, sometimes through the generous supply of foreign teachers, social workers and technocrats, sometimes through a liberal provision of the wrong kind of literature which can only disturb the peace of mind and encourage doubt and disbelief by arousing what is the worst in man, and, sometimes, through campaigns like the popularisation of the TV in the name of raising the standard of living and making life more worthwhile. Often open-handed economic or military aid is made available to the developing countries, and, in return, they are compelled to enforce such changes or to set into operation such schemes as are positively inimical to the

1. Islam and the World (1959).

Islamic temperament and can only lead to the disintegration of the Muslim pattern of living. In brief, while apparently keeping away, the West has thrown such a powerful ring around the Muslim countries and created such conditions in them that these sovereign and independent nations are now caught more firmly in its grip than they were in the bygone days of naked imperialism.

Ironically enough, the rulers of the Islamic world themselves, some of whom never tire of posing before their people as the champions of Muslim regeneration or advocates of a separate Islamic block, are displaying much greater enthusiasm in the carrying out of these changes than the Western crusaders of modernisation and reform in the East. The undiscerning manner in which the educational and the other so-called progressive experiments made in the Soviet Union or America are being pushed through in the Muslim countries, the unbridled freedom that has been given to the Western experts to draw out programmes for a fundamental change in the thinking and disposition of Muslims, the way unlimited opportunities are being provided for indigenous pupils of the Western Orientalists to sow the seeds of skepticism and discord in Muslim society and the recklessness with which the inclination towards luxuriousness and self-indulgence is being fostered and encouragement given to trends like co-education, the abolition of the *purdah* system and the free inter-mixing of the two sexes drive one seriously to doubt if these leaders are not deliberately functioning as the tools of the West and trying purposely to pervert the minds of their people in order to deprive them of the religious pride and moral stamina

which can any day pose a threat to their leadership by blossoming into a powerfull force of Islamic revival. if this process of change and 'reform' is allowed to continue for sometime and the forces of moral degradation and anarchy are left free to work themselves out, the rising generations in thə Muslim countries will drift so far away from their spiritual moorings that no urge will be left in them to strive against the mounting pressures of Modernism and Westernisation. Among the new generaiions that are being exposed more and more to values and concepts imported thoughtlessly from the West the process of cultural, moral and intellectual de-Islamisation has already begun, and as this process will gather momentum the moral leprosy which has become the bane of the Western society will inevitably make a thorough conquest of the Islamic countries as well, and, then, there will remain not a single healthy and healthful society in the World that can hold out the hope for the moral and spiritual resuscitation of mankind.

So far as the West is concerned it can never be genuinely sincere or sympathetic towards the Islamic countries. Its malevolence is, partly, the outcome of history with the memories of the Crusades and the bloody and long-drawn strifes between the Ottoman Empire and the European nations still fresh in the minds, and, partly, it is dictated by commonsense for the Muslim World alone possesses the potential strength and capablity to constitute a danger to the universal ascendancy of the West or to confront it with a new Power Block based on a different philosophy of life and a call that transcends the limitations of race and geography. It is strengthened,

further, by the realisation of the worth and importance of the vast mineral wealth and other natural resources lying within the Muslim lands which can be of a decisive consequence for the West, both economically and strategically. And, finally, there is the traditional weakness of the human nature that when a person is afflicted with an incurable disease he, sometimes, begins to derive a sort of morbid satisfaction from the desire that the others may also become like him so that there could be nothing to distinguish the healthy from the sick. Only those can remain immune from this failing or overcome it successfully who are endowed with a genuine fear of God and love for humanity, but these noble qualities can be developed only through the teachings of the Holy Prophets. This wealth was, sadly, lost by the West ages ago. The entire history of its rise shows that the countries that came under its sway could scarcely save themselves from catching the infection of moral debasement the Western empire-builders invariably carried with them. As some of the more honest and objective Western scholars themselves have admitted, movements for the propagation of agnostic ideas have deliberately been set afloat by Western Imperialists in the Eastern countries as a part of their pelitical policy. However apathetic the West is towards Christianity and to whatever limits of irreligiousness its craze for rationalism and free thinking may have reached at home, all its broadmindedness and liberality of outlook evaporates into thin air when it comes to the World of Islam. The Christian West can forgive the Jews, but not the Muslims. The anti-Muslim sentiment has become a part of its being. Innumerable instances

can be cited to show that in the event of a quarrel between a Muslim and a non-Muslim country the West took the side of the non-Muslim country either openly or through subterfuge. The recent Arab-Israel war has proved conclusively that no Muslim state or community can afford to rely on the friendship of a Western Power. The Muslims must learn to depend solely on God and on their own strength in whatever they do.

The leaders of the Muslim countries ought to realise that whatever good the reckless imitation of the West may do them for the time being it will ultimately rock the foundations of the Islamic *Millat* and bring it to ruin.

Inspite of all their faults and shortcomings, the vital religious feeling, the readiness to strive and suffer in the cause of God and the spirit of earnestness, fidelity and love that have become extinct among the materialistic nations of the West can still be seen in the Islamic countries. The Muslim peoples, their appalling ignorance and backwardness notwithstanding, are the raw material from which the finest models of humanity can be made. Their greatest asset is their faith and their simplicity, earnestness and enthusiasm. In the past, the Muslims have worked wonders by drawing upon these matchless reservoirs of power and, in moments of crisis, it is these very qualities that have come to the rescue of the Islamic countries. Even from the purely utilitarian point of view, the rulers of the Muslim countries should appreciate the latent spiritual vitality of their people and regard it as a most valuable instrument for the defense of national freedom and solidarity which can also enable them to play a role worthy of their great past on the stage of

history. But, thanks to the all-pervading curse of Westernisation, the Muslim masses are being robbed of their spiritual vigour and they are developing a moral cancer against which nothing can avail.

Taking into consideration the irrefutable educational and industrial superiority of the West there are only two courses open to Muslims. One is that they make a complete submission to it, accept its philosophy of life, its concept of the universe and its spiritual convictions and ethical standards *in toto* and try to cast their entire existence into its mould. But such a course, apart from the fact that it will amount to gross apostasy, moral and intellectual hara-kiri and shameless betrayal of humanity whose only hope of redemption rests with this very community, raised up as it was, by the last of the Prophets, can end up only in relentless bloodshed and chaos within the Islamic fraternity. It will be like pulling down a well-conditioned building in the absurd hope of raising opon its ruins a structure for which neither the right kind of technical skill nor building material is available and which will neither be suited to the climate of the place nor be in harmony with the environment. Whenever such an attempt has been made in the Islamic world it has resulted in failure. The Muslim masses have rejected it firmly as soon as an opportunity to freely express their opinion has come their way. The same is happening in Turkey today and is going to happen soon in Syria and Iraq too.

The other course for the Muslims lies in making the fullest use of the physical sciences and technology of the West by learning them wholeheartedly and then subordi-

nating them by means of their own intelligence and industry to the lofty purposes which the last of the Holy Prophets has bequeathed to them and by virtue of which they have won the distinction of being proclaimed as the 'Best of the People'. This happy co-ordination of the ends and means from the absence of which both the West and the East are suffering at present can alter the destiny of the world. It can save it from impending annihilation and put it back on the road to progress and felicity. The West has all the resources in the world but it is devoid of a healthy sense of purpose; the (Muslim) East is endowed with the soundest of aims and ideals but is every backward materially. As we have said earlier, this laudable task can be accomplished by no other people than the Muslims who are the successors of the last of the Apostles of God and the sole inheritors of his Message. The slogan of the Muslims, all over the world, should now be:

The tyranny of the West has laid the world to waste.
Arise, O Architect of the *Harem*, to build it again.

A bold and enterprising country of the East, namely, Japan nas shown us the way, although in a limited, and, from the standpoint of Islam, most imperfect manner. Japan learnt the material sciences and technology from the West and acquired mastery over them and, at the sametime, it held fast to its spiritual background and cultural heritage. But, unfortunately, its religious creed and civilization were such that they could not keep abreast of time or fulfil the need of a universal message. The Japanese culture is only an amalgam of antiquated beliefs and out-worn traditions. It is a miracle of the

will-power and loyalty to the past of its people that modern Japan is still clinging to it. With Islam, on the other hand, it is wholely different. It stands for a faith, a *Shariat* and a law for which the term 'ancient' and 'modern' have no meaning, and a civilisation whose roots are embedded in imperishable truths. Like an evergreen tree it is always young and ready to send forth new blossoms. Hence, in the Muslim countries the integration between modern sciences and the fundamental teachings of Islam can be worked out without any serious difficulty and its impact will also be much more revolutionary and extensive than what we have experienced in Japan. In a tradition-bound country an attempt like this is bound to be self-defeating. For a Muslim, however, there need be no contradiction in it, for, according to him, correct religion and correct knowledge do not pull in opposite direction or stand in each other's way. Knowledge, says a Tradition of the sacred Prophet, is the lost property of a Muslim and he is its rightful owner. From the Muslim view-point, it is the end for which a means is employed that determines whether it is good or bad. The true purpose of knowledge, power and all other worldly resources and acquirements is that they serve the cause of the Divine faith and help to promote the genuine welfare of mankind. It is the duty of a Muslim to see that these precious gifts of God are not misused. To take them out of the wrong place and to put them in the right place and to assure that they are employed for constructive ends is a matter of moral responsibility with him.

But the Muslims can discharge this sacred obligation only when they are able to produce in themselves that

strength of faith and courage of conviction and skill and sincerity which can repulse the onslaught of imitative tendencies and glittering catch-words and overcome the petty considerations of immediate gain, both individual and collective. For this their leaders, too, will have to make the necessary sacrifices, but, even from the personal point of view these sacrifices will not be in vain. By virtue of them, they will rise tremendously in the estimation of their people and it will also become possible for them, and through them, for their countries, to play the sublime role of guidance and leadership they can never dream of otherwise.

The Western civilisation is doomed. It has become rotten to the core, and if it is still surviving it is not, at all, due to any of its latent qualities but because no other civilisation is ready to take its place. The other civilizations in the world are, at the utmost, its own hazy carbon copies or third class caricatures or they are so weak and decrepit that it is beyond their ability to stand against it face to face. Now if a Muslim country or the world of Islam, as a whole, can muster enough strength and competence to fill the void that is going to be created by the fall of the Western civilisation it can re-establish its claim to the leadership of mankind which, according to the unchanging practice of the Lord, always goes to those that are earnest, deephearted and resolute. The Muslims ought, therefore, to decide whether it is more honourable to approach the West with a begging bowl or to assume the exalted position of the stewardship and guidance of humanity than which there is no greater glory in the world after Apostleship. Does the sacrifice of worldly renown,

power and wealth count for anything before it ? Even if a man possessed a hundred lives and he had to lay down all of them for the sake of it the bargain would not be bad.

Let us, now, see which Muslim country comes forward to take up the gauntlet and carries out the lofty mission in comparison with which the mighty events of the past, such as the European renaissance or the French and Soviet revolutions, must fade into insignificance for the forces of peace, progress and freedom it will release will not remain confined to the Islamic countries alone but sweep across the world and give a fresh lease of life to the dying humanity. Only those people or communities can respond to this call who are bound in allegiance to the *Millet* of Ibrahim and for whom the choicest Qurnaic tidings and reward of the 'Last of Divine Faiths' and 'the Termination of the Line of Holy Apostles' were meant. Today, the 'Song of Eternity' for the leaders of the Islamic World is the same the Muslims had heard long, long ago at the dawn of Islam :

> And strive for Allah with the endeavour which is His right. He has chosen you and has not laid upon you in religion any hardship, the faith of your father Abraham is (yours). He has named you Muslims (those who have surrendered unto Him) of old times and in this (scripture) that the messenger may be witness against you, and that you may be witness against mankind. So, establish worship, pay poor-tax, and hold fast to Allah. He is your protecting friend; the best of partrons and the best of helpers.

(Quran: XXII : 78)

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